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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to assist fiscal policy team members in assessing current standards and practices of school transportation systems in relation to the total school program. Team members should read the guide independently to determine their own familiarity with requirements essential to school transportation operation. An introductory statement, school transportation goal, and one or more standards that serve as reference points against which current practices can be assessed are provided in each of eight sections: (1) organization and administration; (2) financial management; (3) facilities management; (4) equipment management; (5) human resources management; (6) operations; (7) pupil management; and (8) public relations. Results to questions answered independently by team members should be used as a basis for discussion and help facilitate improving the district's school transportation program. (EJS)

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A Self-Assessment Guide for School District Fiscal Policy Teams

Pupil Transportation Services



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A Self-Assessment Guide
for School District Fiscal Policy Teams

Pupil Transportation Services

Prepared under the direction of the
Field Services Branch
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Preface

This document, a self-assessment guide for fiscal policy teams, is centered on the fiscal and program elements of pupil transportation services. Each of these elements has a direct or indirect impact on the health, welfare, and education of the pupils transported by the district. The guide focuses attention on the basic and unique elements of a school transportation operation and is designed to promote effective communication, trust, and understanding among the transportation department, school administration, and governing board. It may also be used as a basis for developing and implementing a plan of action for achieving more effective and efficient school transportation services.

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Introduction to the Guide

This guide has been prepared to assist the school district governing board, the district superintendent, the district's chief business official, the school transportation administrator, and other fiscal policy team members in assessing the current standards and practices of their school transportation system in relation to the total school program. The standards described in this guide are designed to help the team make improvements and to stimulate discussion among members of the fiscal policy team about the operation of the district's school transportation program. This guide is not intended to be used as a personnel evaluation tool. Improvements, if needed, require the commitment of all district administrators. Team members should realize that progress requires a certain amount of time and planning.

Background: Pupil Transportation

In 1932 California adopted a state plan for pupil transportation. The California State Department of Education worked with the California Department of Highway Patrol, the California State Department of Motor Vehicles, the California State Department of Industrial Relations, and the California State Railroad Commission to develop the plan to guarantee pupil safety. The need for safe, cost-effective transportation was vital to the education of California's schoolchildren. In many communities the school bus was the only link between home and the schoolhouse. In some of the rural areas, the school bus was also used to bring members of the community to town for supplies. The value of the school bus to California's education system has been proven many times.

Today, California's school transportation system is the third largest in the country and the largest in the state. The system is made up of more than 21,000 school buses, which travel in excess of 280 million miles annually, transporting over 1.3 million pupils to and from school daily. The cost of operating the system represents approximately \$600 million or 3 percent of the total state appropriation for kindergarten through grade twelve.

Fiscal Policy Team

The Department of Education initiated the concept of fiscal policy teams and self-assessment guides in 1988 as an outgrowth of the state's effort to improve financial management and business practices within the local educational agencies. As resources for schools become more limited, the need for improved resource allocation methodologies become more evident.

The idea of a fiscal policy team grew from discussions focused on the following questions:

- How can school districts improve their overall budget and financial planning?
- Who needs to be involved in the financial planning process?
- How can board members and administrators work together in the planning process?

From these discussions it became clear that a team approach is necessary for the district to manage its affairs successfully. Team membership will vary according to the size of the district, the specific topics being discussed, and, most important, the needs and demands of the district.

A fiscal policy team is typically composed of one or more board members; the superintendent; the chief business official; and others, such as the transportation administrator, as appropriate. (In small districts the team might include the lead person in its transportation operation or an appropriate staff member from the office of the county superintendent of schools.)

The goals of the fiscal policy teams are to improve communications between the governing board and the school administration and to enhance the basic knowledge and understanding of fiscal and business practices among fiscal policy team members.

Roles of Team Members

Members of the team play significant but different roles in the assessment process. These roles may change as the concept of the fiscal policy team is modified to meet the needs of the district. Team members have varying responsibilities according to their positions and bring unique skills and personal interest to the planning process. All team

members should maintain a broad level of interest in the process so that all points of view can be integrated into final decisions. The key decision makers and their traditional roles are listed below. In implementing the concept of the fiscal policy team, however, the district roles and responsibilities may be merged into a more collegial decision-making process.

The *governing board members* are responsible for developing policies, establishing board goals consistent with the financial condition of the district, and assisting in the determination of district priorities.

The *superintendent* is responsible for implementing board policies and directing management and staff in the assessment of overall district needs, reporting to the board the status of current and proposed laws and regulations that affect the district, and coordinating the fiscal policy team planning process.

The *chief business official* is responsible for providing current and projected financial information for both the school transportation operation and the district as a whole.

The *school transportation administrator* is responsible for conducting the overall day-to-day management of the school transportation system, making assessments of the district's current transportation operation, providing the projected operational and fiscal needs, and recommending options and alternatives to identified school transportation issues.

Suggested Use of the Guide

This guide should be read independently by all fiscal policy team members so that they can determine their own familiarity with a district's policies, processes, available data, mandated responsibilities, and other requirements essential to the school transportation operation. The guide contains a policy reference column to assist team members in identifying questions that pertain to fiscal or programmatic areas. In some instances both areas will apply. The team should then meet for a discussion or series of discussions of each member's assessment of the district's school transportation operation. These discussions will, over time, enable the team to establish a common vocabulary, develop increased knowledge of the district's school transportation operation, and provide a basis for working together as an effective team.

The guide is divided into eight sections:

- I. Organization and Administration
- II. Financial Management
- III. Facilities Management
- IV. Equipment Management

- V. Human Resources Management
- VI. Operations
- VII. Pupil Management
- VIII. Public Relations

Each section contains an introductory statement, a school transportation goal, and one or more standards that serve as reference points against which current district practices may be assessed. The questions that follow each standard should be used to guide the discussion. Each member of the fiscal policy team should respond independently according to his or her best judgment of the district's policies and practices.

Upon completion of the questions in each section, the team members should compare answers and use the results as a basis for an in-depth discussion. To facilitate resolution of differences and communication among the members, the team should focus on questions to which any member responds negatively.

The discussion is expected to rely heavily on the chief business official, the school transportation administrator, or the person most knowledgeable about the program. These individuals are expected to have reviewed the questions well in advance and to have gathered necessary data and reports for review during the discussion.

The team should complete work on each section before moving on to the next section. *The questions are meant to facilitate movement toward improving the operation of the district's school transportation program.* These discussions should result in decisions necessary for the district to achieve high standards for safe and efficient pupil transportation services.

Each member of the policy team should respond to the questions with a Yes or No answer according to his or her best judgment.

Section I

Organization and Administration

Effective pupil transportation programs must use all available resources—people, vehicles, funding, and facilities—to the fullest. Successful programs are organized and managed on sound business principles and provide safe and timely service at a reasonable cost. In addition, successful programs require that the governing board, the school administration, and the director agree on a philosophy. Team members need to understand one another's organizational and administrative needs and processes. Pupil transportation programs are not to be construed solely as a fiscal entity but as a partner in the district's educational program.

GOAL: To provide an organizational structure that effectively controls the transportation resources of the district and provides predetermined services to students which meet or exceed all federal, state, and local regulations

1. **Standard:** The transportation program has a clear organizational structure and lines of authority. These are reflected in the organization charts and job descriptions, which are reviewed annually, revised as necessary, and approved by the governing board.

- a. Does the transportation program have a written organization chart that shows clear lines of authority and has been approved by the governing board?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Program

b. Has the staffing level of the program been reviewed on an annual basis to determine whether the job positions are necessary and adequate for the program as determined by the governing board?

2. **Standard:** The governing board and the school administration have adopted written policies and procedures that allow for efficient program operations. Policies established meet local needs and comply with all federal and state laws as well as the regulations of the California State Department of Education, the California State Department of Motor Vehicles, and the California Department of Highway Patrol.

- a. Has the governing board adopted specific written policies and rules regarding the pupil transportation program?
- b. Do the governing board policies include a definition of what is considered a safe and reasonable walking distance for children?
- c. Have parents, pupils, and school administrators been informed of the policies and rules that have been established regarding the transportation program?
- d. Does the mechanical condition of the fleet meet standards set by the California Highway Patrol and other regulatory agencies?
- e. Is driver training in compliance with all standards as determined by the California Highway Patrol, State Department of Motor Vehicles, and State Department of Education?

- f. Have bus stops and loading zones approved by the district superintendent been evaluated and designed for maximum safety as required by state regulations?
3. **Standard:** The governing board of the school district provides transportation to meet the educational needs of special education pupils through individual educational programs (IEPs) as provided for in Public Law 94-142.
- a. Does the district have written policy which outlines the procedures and limitations of this type of transportation?
- b. Could some children who now ride the special education bus ride a regular bus instead?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Fiscal/Program

Section II

Financial Management

Sound financial management practices produce fully accountable programs through appropriate cost-containment measures and revenue-generating activities. A quality program budget reflects cost-reducing strategies and meets the needs of students.

The pupil transportation program budget projects revenues and expenses on the basis of student demand, staffing, cost-of-living adjustments, fuel costs, and anticipated state reimbursement rates. The budget may be affected by unanticipated circumstances such as weather conditions, alternative means of transportation, unexpected increases in insurance costs, and bargaining unit contract negotiations.

GOAL: To provide a cost-effective transportation system which effectively meets the needs of the district as determined by the community and school district governing board

1. **Standard:** The transportation program meets the needs of the district as defined by board policy and has been determined cost-effective and within the means of the district.
 - a. Has the transportation department provided a budget, and has it adhered to that budget?
 - b. Does the budget accurately reflect all costs, including employee benefits, insurance, capital outlay, and administrative support costs?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Fiscal

- c. Has the district considered alternative methods for providing home-to-school transportation?
 - d. Have cost comparisons been conducted to determine the cost-effectiveness of the transportation program?
 - e. Has the district determined the level of encroachment on the general fund and compared the annual changes to cost-of-living adjustments provided by the general fund?
2. **Standard: Costs are analyzed and controlled on a regular basis, with attention paid to projections and the remaining budget.**
- a. Does the transportation program include realistic projections of all identifiable costs?
 - b. Is there a management information system which accurately identifies all costs?
3. **Standard: Purchasing specifications are used in the procurement of goods and services and are readily available to all vendors.**
- a. Are specifications designed to avoid sole-source purchasing?
 - b. Are specifications reviewed regularly to address new technology changes in market place supply, quality, and other relevant factors?
 - c. Are purchased items evaluated periodically for compliance with specifications and vendor performance?
 - d. Does the district consider the use of cooperative purchasing available through the State Department of General Services in deciding on purchases?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal
		Fiscal

4. **Standard:** The district maintains its financial records according to the generally accepted accounting principles as defined in the *California School Accounting Manual*.

- Have audits been conducted to show compliance?

5. **Standard:** The district has provided for sufficient liability insurance coverage.

- Has the district evaluated the insurance coverage for activities related to transportation?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Fiscal

Section III

Facilities Management

A well-maintained fleet of buses, whether operated directly by the district or under contract, is essential to the success of a pupil transportation system. The effectiveness and efficiency of pupil transportation services will be enhanced if a secure facility is provided to store and maintain the transportation fleet.

GOAL: To provide adequate facilities for staff, drivers, maintenance, and administration as well as bus storage which provides an efficient and safe environment for the transportation program

1. Standard: Facilities are secure from theft and vandalism.

- Are facilities secured from the general public, and are procedures in place to prevent theft and vandalism to equipment, facilities, and supplies?

2. Standard: Facility design and space are adequate to maximize efficiency of bus repair and storage.

- Is there sufficient space for the transportation operation?
- Is there room for growth in the present facility?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Program
		Program

3. **Standard:** The district's hazardous materials policy considers cost as well as compliance with all federal, state, and local requirements.

- a. Is the district in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements?
- b. Has the district considered all cost alternatives regarding the handling of hazardous materials, such as fuel and oil, as well as storage, distribution, and disposal?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Fiscal

Section IV

Equipment Management

As conditions change, the demand for pupil transportation may increase at a time when the bus fleet is aging. The challenge of ensuring a large enough fleet of safe and reliable vehicles requires both budgetary and operational planning and follow-through.

GOAL: To maintain an adequate number of vehicles and support equipment to provide for safe pupil transportation for current and future needs

1. **Standard:** A comprehensive plan is in place which encompasses future growth as well as a cost-effective replacement program for school buses and support equipment.
 - a. Are there a plan and budget for the acquisition of vehicles for replacement and growth?
 - b. Do standards exist for making decisions in regard to repairing versus replacing equipment?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal
		Fiscal

2. **Standard:** All vehicles will be maintained in safe operating condition in compliance with the inspection requirements of the California Highway Patrol.

- a. Are all records rated satisfactory by the California Highway Patrol?
- b. Does the district have an effective vehicle preventive maintenance program for all vehicles?
- c. Are all school buses in service and certified by the California Highway Patrol?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Fiscal/Program
		Fiscal

Section V

Human Resources Management

Managing people is one of the most challenging jobs in a school district. Attitudes, abilities, knowledge, and interests influence the success or failure of any operation, including pupil transportation programs. Management must set clear work standards and effectively supervise people to ensure that the standards are met. Consistently recognizing excellent performance is effective in helping employees attain peak performance. The result will be an environment that enhances employee productivity, growth, development, and morale.

Human resources management includes recruiting and hiring qualified personnel, maintaining personnel records, establishing work standards, and providing training activities for employees. Districts should make available advancement opportunities for the pupil transportation program employees who want to be promoted and who complete specific training programs.

GOAL: To have clear, well-defined employment practices which are communicated to all employees and prospective employees; are in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations; and meet the needs of district

1. *Standard:* Each position within the transportation department has a written job description.

a. Is there a written job description for each position?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program

- b. Do job descriptions include minimum qualifications, including experience, education, and legal requirements?
- c. Are employees evaluated according to performance expectations and job descriptions?
- d. Is there a current employee handbook clearly communicating all policies and procedures?

GOAL: To have a development and training program which meets the needs of and enhances the transportation program

1. Standard: An adequate number of qualified personnel have been hired for each job classification.

- a. Are all current positions filled?
- b. Are all drivers' records reviewed on a regular basis to determine whether all qualifications are up to date?
- c. Is there a staff development program for each job classification?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Fiscal/Program
		Program
		Fiscal/Program

GOAL: To have a safe, drug-free work environment

1. Standard: The district has a policy on drugs for all transportation department employees and enforces that policy.

- a. Has the district governing board adopted a clearly communicated drug policy?
- b. Does the policy include an employee assistance program?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Fiscal/Program
		Fiscal/Program

Section VI

Operations

Decisions about the day-to-day operation of the pupil transportation system have both economic and safety implications. School districts make decisions about such issues as school starting times and bus routes which have major cost implications for the pupil transportation system.

Fortunately, bus accidents are infrequent events. Unfortunately, some accidents have resulted in serious injuries and fatalities. It is sometimes difficult for districts to understand the importance of the multitude of safety procedures designed to reduce the likelihood of accidents.

GOAL: To provide a safe and efficient transportation system that will complement the educational needs of the pupils

1. **Standard: Transportation routing provides maximum safety for pupils and staff and meets the needs of the district.**

- a. Are there guidelines and procedures adopted to provide maximum safety at stops and loading zones?
- b. Does the district have a policy that limits a pupil's riding time on school buses?
- c. Does the district have a system for optimizing the use of school buses for home-to-school transportation?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Fiscal/Program

2. *Standard:* All activity trips are requested and approved through the transportation department.

- Are all activity trips operated in compliance with state regulations and district policy?

GOAL: To have procedures in place which will address emergency situations

1. *Standard:* Staff members, drivers, and pupils are instructed and rehearsed in the procedures to be used in an accident or a disaster.

- Are emergency bus evacuation drills conducted with drivers and pupils at least once each semester?
- Is there an emergency plan in effect for earthquake, fire, floods, and so on, which includes procedures to be followed by all transportation personnel?
- Have all drivers been instructed in proper procedures in case of accidents?
- Does the district employ a two-way communication system with which to communicate with the drivers on school buses?
- Does the district have an accident review policy?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Fiscal/Program
		Fiscal/Program

Section VII

Pupil Management

The bus driver has responsibilities in addition to driving the bus. He or she is expected to teach students appropriate behavior while riding to and from school. The consistent enforcement of standards of behavior contributes to a safe and positive experience for both students and staff.

GOAL: To provide pupil management policies and procedures which maximize the safety of pupils, drivers, and the public

1. **Standard:** As required by state regulations, the pupil management program clearly defines the responsibilities and procedures of school bus drivers, parents, pupils, and district administrative personnel.
 - a. Does the district have policies and procedures for pupils' discipline?
 - b. Are all pupils instructed in safe riding practices on an annual basis?
 - c. Are bus rules and disciplinary procedures communicated to pupils, parents, teachers, and other interested parties?
2. **Standard:** The policy on pupil management is enforced with the cooperation of the administration, local government, teachers, and parents.
 - Are disciplinary rules for pupils enforced on a consistent basis?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Program
		Program

Section VIII

Public Relations

The public image of the transportation system is an important component of the public's perception of the educational system. Problems can often be minimized through clear communication with students, parents, teachers, and the general public.

GOAL: To establish a relationship with district personnel and the general public to promote a positive image and establish trust and awareness of the transportation system

1. **Standard:** The governing board and the school administration have adopted written policies and procedures that allow for effective communication with the public.
 - a. Are routes, schedules, and stops communicated to parents via written communication and published in the media?
 - b. Has the district adopted policies to communicate with the public during an emergency?
2. **Standard:** The public is informed about special events in a positive manner.
 - Are representatives from the local media invited to attend special events such as safety awards presentations and school bus roadeos?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program
		Program

3. **Standard:** Transportation personnel maintain effective communication with school administrators and keep them informed of policies, legislation, and issues affecting the transportation program.

- a. Are transportation reports made periodically to the district governing board?
- b. Have board members and school administrators observed the transportation program in operation?

Yes	No	Policy Reference
		Program
		Program

Selected References

California Civil Code Section 54.2.

California Code of Regulations, Title 5, sections 14102, 14103; Title 13, sections 1200–1203, 682, 695, 696, 1061, 1062, 1085, 1086, 1087.

California Contract Code Section 20111.

California Education Code sections 10900–10915, 35330–35322, 39800–39860, 40070, 41850–41854, 42290–42292, 44807–44808.5, 49406.

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Transportation Handbook. Sacramento: California Association of School Business Officials, 1988.

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